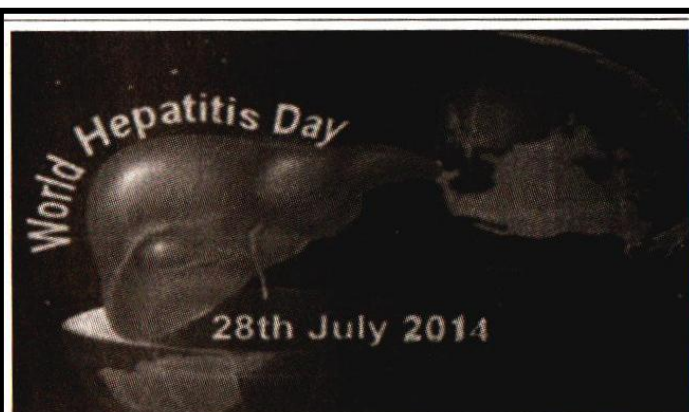


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Bid to boost HCV control practices – health minister

EGYPT is no longer classified as one of the countries with the highest rate of hepatitis C virus infection and the state has drawn up a strategy to overcome hepatic viruses, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The Minister of Health, Dr Adel Adawi, said that six aspects of the strategy had been concluded. They were based on surveillance, infection prevention and control, hepatitis B virus vaccination, care and treatment, communication and research.

He said that a comprehensive survey of hepatitis C virus had been done and 50 liver centres had been established nationwide. They were expecting to treat 300,000 patients by the end of the year. A national survey had revealed that the infection rate had reached seven per cent between the ages of 15 and 59.

He said the ministry was keen to add new medicines to treat HCV and it is scheduled to add drugs of the second generation into treatment systems at the liver centres to cure the disease. The recovery rate with use of these drugs is 95 per cent.

"Unfortunately, many people in our region still acquire the infection in health care settings, through unsafe injections and blood transfusions," said Dr Alaa Alwan, the WHO Regional Director, on the occasion of World Hepatitis Day.

WHO and the Ministry of Health are launching a national injection safety project to reinforce infection control measures and transition to the exclusive use of safe syringes. The project falls within the context of the WHO Global Initiative for Injection Safety, in which Egypt was cho-

sen to participate as one of three pilot countries, with India and Uganda. The project will foster new training approaches for healthcare workers to achieve changes in practice and develop measures to educate and engage the community in the promotion of safe injection practices.

Dr Adawi hailed the initiative, stressing the importance of co-ordinating global efforts to overcome the disease.

Egypt has been chosen to hold the event because of the commitment by the political leadership in the country for prevention, especially for injection safety.

"I commend Egypt on the progress made in their national hepatitis C treatment programme," said Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General. "The Egyptians are giving us an example of the achievements that can be made when political commitment, resources and results-oriented planning come together."

Dr Henk Beedam, WHO representative, praised the policies adopted by the government to cope with HCV. He said the challenge of coping with the disease requires a concerted global effort to ensure that healthcare is safe and that people are informed about infection, transmission and prevention. He urged the authorities in Egypt to exert all efforts to raise awareness of the risks of HCV, especially in rural areas to limit an increase in new cases of infection.

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